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DOJ Scales Back Bondi's DC Police Directive

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The U.S. Department of Justice has agreed to scale back an order issued by Attorney General Pam Bondi that initially sought to place a federal official in charge of Washington, D.C.'s police force. The move followed pushback from city officials and intervention by a federal judge who questioned the legality of the directive.

Bondi's original order, issued on Thursday, had named Drug Enforcement Administration Administrator Terry Cole as "Emergency Police Commissioner," a role that would have transferred authority away from Metropolitan Police Department Chief Pamela Smith. Local leaders argued the directive violated the District's Home Rule Act, which grants the city authority over its own police force.

On Friday, after an emergency hearing before U.S. District Judge Ana Reyes, the Justice Department revised the directive. The updated order confirmed that Chief Smith would remain in charge of the Metropolitan Police Department. Instead of assuming command, Cole will act as a federal designee responsible for coordinating requests with D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser.

The revised directive instructs Bowser to provide assistance in enforcing federal immigration laws, including the location and detention of individuals unlawfully present in the United States. This requirement drew immediate concern from city officials, who argued it conflicted with local policing policies.

Judge Reyes noted during the hearing that the Justice Department's initial attempt to replace the police chief likely exceeded federal authority. She warned that without changes, the court would have been forced to issue a temporary restraining order against the Justice

Department. “These are the kind of issues that should be decided between the District and the government,” Reyes said, urging both sides to find common ground.

The Justice Department’s decision to revise the directive was seen as a concession that the initial order went beyond its legal authority. Attorneys for both the DOJ and the D.C. attorney general’s office confirmed that revisions were made to avoid direct conflict in court.

The episode sparked political reactions. Democratic lawmakers announced plans to introduce a resolution to block what they described as an overreach of federal power in Washington, D.C. Senator Chris Van Hollen said the attempted takeover undermined the city’s right to govern its own affairs. However, with Republicans controlling the House and Senate, the measure is unlikely to advance.

The dispute comes as President Donald Trump continues his broader law enforcement initiative, which has included deploying National Guard personnel to Washington to support local anti-crime operations. The revised order ensures that while federal agencies may request support from D.C. authorities, operational command of the city’s police remains with Chief Smith.